

SPEECH OF HON. JOHN W. BAKER,
OF PENNSYLVANIA, ON
THE REPEAL

By John Littleton Baker

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SPEECH

OF

HON. JOHN L. DAWSON,

OF PENNSYLVANIA,

ON

THE REBELLION;

DELIVERED

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SPEECH

The House having under consideration the bill in regard to the rebellious States—

Mr. DAWSON said:

Mr. SPEAKER: This is the earliest moment that I have been able to get the floor, to say that the gentleman who represents the district of Pittsburg [Mr. MOORHEAD] has seen proper to make my speech of the 24th of February the subject of one delivered by himself on the 26th ultimo. I regret that I cannot characterize the gentleman's effort as an argument. There is, indeed, very little in it that rises to that level. I had scarcely supposed it necessary to notice it on this floor. It is profuse in denunciations of disloyalty and of alleged sympathy with the rebellion. They constitute, indeed, the staple of his speech. While to me he disavows any intention of giving them a personal bearing, yet by implication they are regarded as personal, and his friends, at least, have made the application.

In his opening remark, in the declaration that I had stated with great frankness and clearness the *grounds of my opposition to the war*, he has been guilty of a gross misstatement. In common with the party with which I have the honor to act, from its first outbreak I accepted the war as a necessity, and, while I have fearlessly condemned the policy which governs it, have never hesitated to support it within what I deemed the constitutional limits. The Democratic party have acted throughout these trying troubles with a magnanimity and greatness of purpose that no other political organization ever exhibited. They did try to avoid the war. War is the greatest of all national misfortunes; a civil war is the worst of wars, and this promised to be the most gigan-

tic of civil wars. They opposed Abolitionism because they knew it would bring war and desolation in its train. They tried their utmost to bring all difficulties between the North and the South to a peaceful and an honorable settlement; and they failed, not for want of will but want of power. When the war came, when the vindictive stubbornness of Abolitionists and secessionists left no choice but support of the Government by arms or submission to a rupture of the Union, the Democracy offered their blood and money for the Union freely, without stint, without reservation, without measure. All they asked in return was that the party in power should conduct it honestly and fairly, for the purpose of restoring the Union and saving the Constitution.

My colleague falls readily into the trite and well-worn style of reply which his party leaders have taught him. If any Democrat objects to an act of the Administration, he raises the cry of disloyalty, and insists that we should employ our time solely in denouncing secession. If we see the money of the nation squandered, the Constitution trampled upon, the laws disregarded, public liberty endangered, the right of suffrage taken away, the freedom of speech and of the press restricted and punished, the Union for which we are bleeding laughed at as a thing of the past, we must, according to my colleague's code of political morals, find no fault with those who do these wrongs, ask for no reform, seek no change. The respect I have for my colleague forbids me to say that this is the mere twaddle of the demagogue. Such abject submission is only fit for a slave, wholly unfit for a freeman.

He pronounces an eulogy upon General Cass. That great old **man** will be filled with grief

if he hears that an avowed and open Abolitionist has spoken of him in such terms. It was heartless cruelty to vex the evening of that venerable patriot's life by praise which implies that his whole public career has been a false one. What has General Cass done to deserve such a eulogy from him? He claims the right to speak of him because "he and I once and again, but vainly, labored" to make him President. It is true that while my colleague professed to be a Democrat he also professed to be a Cass man. After the battle of Buena Vista, however, he deserted his friend Cass and went over to General Taylor. The Whigs of that day were not willing that "Rough and Ready" should be so unceremoniously appropriated, and my colleague early in 1848 came back to General Cass with professions of foud devotion, quite as loud as they are now for Abraham Lincoln. After the October elections of that year, which indicated that General Taylor was to be the lucky candidate, my colleague's zeal suddenly evaporated, and at the presidential election which followed he failed to vote for General Cass.

My colleague has repeated what he alleges was said to him by General Cass. It is not in good taste, nor is it by any means a safe practice, to repeat private conversations. The old-fashioned notions of society which regulated intercourse between well-bred people always discountenanced the practice. I know my colleague with a manly bearing condemned the stone-breakers for their private revelations in the memorable contest in 1838, when he and I joined hands for the elevation of David R. Porter to the chief magistracy of Pennsylvania. But having assumed the responsibility to repeat, he has no right to report him in a way which would make the General seem false to the faith of his fathers. I tell my colleague that that great man for more than twenty years had warned the country that the Union would be destroyed if a sectional President should be elected upon a platform which ignored the Constitution. After the elections of 1860 had shown that all his efforts to avoid such a result had failed, well might he have said, "We are lost and destroyed." And my colleague quotes the language in which the patriot mourned over the

triumph of Abolitionism as evidence that the patriot himself was an apostate to the unsullied record and noble example of his life.

If the retirement of General Cass from office in the winter of 1861 be construed as just condemnation, how shall we construe that of Mr. Holt, who remained in his place as Secretary of War until the 4th of March, and gave his most earnest support to the Buchanan Administration, and at the close of it expressed his most cordial approbation of all the President had done, as well as all he had forborne to do. In his letter of the 2d March, 1861, filed in the State Department, resigning the office of Secretary of War at the close of Mr. Buchanan's Administration, Mr. Holt bears attestation "to the enlightened statesmanship and unsullied patriotism of the President." Mr. Holt has the confidence of President Lincoln, and holds by his appointment at this time the responsible office of Judge Advocate General. General Dix, Secretary of the Treasury in the Cabinet of Mr. Buchanan, now a major general in the Army, appointed by Mr. Lincoln, in his address on retiring from the Cabinet and referring to Mr. Buchanan, declared himself "impressed with the purity of his motives, his conscientiousness, his thorough acquaintance with the business of the Government in its most complex details, and his anxious desire that the unhappy questions which distract the country may have a peaceful solution."

It is surprising that my colleague in his assault upon the Administration of Mr. Buchanan, repeats here in his place the stale charge that Floyd, the Secretary of War, stole a large portion of the public arms and transferred them to southern arsenals. The allegation is of little importance, except as far as it misrepresents a Democratic Administration. My colleague was a member of the Thirty-Sixth Congress, and should have known that a committee constituted by the House, of which Mr. Stanton, a leading Republican, was chairman, and of which a majority were Republicans, reported on the 18th day of February, 1861, that the southern States received in 1860 less, instead of more, than the quota of arms to which they were entitled by law; and that three of them, North Carolina, Mississippi, and

Kentucky, received no arms whatever, and this simply because they did not ask for them. I refer my colleague to the report, which will be found in the second volume of Reports of Committees of the House for 1860-61.

It is stranger still that my colleague has repeated that the Administration were derelict in not arresting the progress of the rebellion in its early stages. I reassert what I stated in my remarks of the 24th of February, that the law of the 28th of February, 1795, did not confer upon the President sufficient power to employ military force to execute the laws and protect the public property, and that Mr. Buchanan, in his message to Congress on the 8th of January, 1861, asked for such authority. Congress failed to grant it. My colleague was a member of that Congress. It is a sad commentary on the degeneracy of the times that he should stand up here in the broad light of the heavens to revile the then President for omitting to do what he, among others who constituted a majority in Congress, failed to grant the power to do. This is a gross abuse of our patience, to which the boldness of Catiline would scarcely have been equal, and if he had been blessed with Catiline's sagacity he would have seen that it was useless.

The gentleman asserts that our financial success has become the wonder of the world. I agree with him that it is a wonder. On the 1st of January, 1861, prior to the commencement of hostilities, the entire circulation of all the banks, North and South, was but a fraction over \$202,000,000, while on the 1st of January, 1863, in the States known as the loyal States, the circulation exceeded \$238,500,000. Add to this the United States Treasury notes, interest-bearing Treasury notes, fractional currency, and certificates of indebtedness, all of which circulate as currency, and it amounts to over \$779,000,000. Put to that the issue of the new national banks, which in the aggregate swell the volume of circulation to more than \$1,000,000,000, and he will learn the magnitude of the Government issues. The legitimate business of the entire country before the war could be transacted upon a circulation of a fraction over \$202,000,000. Now, with a divided country and with commercial intercourse comparatively restricted, the circula-

tion is increased to more than \$1,000,000,000, deranging the measure of all values, one dollar in gold, the constitutional currency, commanding \$1 81 in greenbacks. Well may it be pronounced a wonder. Prior to 1861, the average daily clearances in the clearing-house of the city of New York were only about \$22,000,000, while of late they have averaged over \$115,000,000, and have even run up as high as \$146,000,000 in one day. My colleague should read much and reflect more before venturing to become a public instructor.

But notwithstanding the freedom with which the gentleman impeaches the motives of classes as well as individuals, I look over his speech in vain for any condemnation of the usurpations of those in authority, and especially for the slightest reflection upon the miserable crowd of sappers and miners—the contractors who have fattened themselves on the blood and tears and distresses of the nation—whose howl is ever fiercest for the war, whose policy it is to prolong it, and who denounce without measure all who seek to give it a proper direction or a speedy termination. We, in Pennsylvania, have seen these harpies feeding on the life-blood of the State, and my colleague knows—none knows better than he—the paralyzing and consuming power of the frauds on which he chooses to preserve a silence so profoundly *loyal*. As a faithful sentinel on the watchtower of the nation, why has he never given notice that this same class of persons are gnawing its foundations away? It was Madame Roland who, when the caldron of the revolution was boiling over in France, weeping over the degradation of society and the frauds that were everywhere apparent, exclaimed: "O Liberty!" (and I might add, O loyalty!) "what crimes are committed in thy name!"

I have great respect, Mr. Speaker, for an argument, for statesmanlike views, and for a candid and honest difference of opinion; but it required a great deal of assurance, almost the audacity of ignorance, to charge me with no expression of sympathy for the soldier who had defended his home and my home, when since the commencement of the session I have been laboring in his presence in obedience to the united sentiment and instruction of my party, and against the opposition of him and

his friends, to secure to the soldier a just compensation for his services. The soldier wants and is entitled to substantial aid, not mere expressions of admiration and sympathy, but something to supply his physical wants and comforts, and especially those of his wife and children in his absence. This material aid the Democratic party as a unit have repeatedly offered on this floor, and as often has it been ruled out of order and defeated. He cannot forget, and if he does I refer him to the remarks which I had the honor to submit on the 17th of February, the occasion on which I offered a proposition to increase the soldiers' pay, and declared that they had performed their duty with noble fidelity and zeal, and that Antietam, Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and Chattanooga were monuments of their bravery and patriotism that would bear their fame to a distant and admiring future, and were at least entitled to our justice. I may further say that on that occasion I declared that wherever any part of that great Army had moved on the water or upon the land its ranks had been filled with thousands of gallant Democrats, many of whom now sleep in soldiers' graves.

But, Mr. Speaker, such exhibitions are not uncommon in struggles like the present, when the country is in the throes of revolution. The tenor of his speech is the same which pervades a thousand speeches since these troubles commenced. Notwithstanding the evils which civil wars bring to the masses, there are always some dashing patriots who scout the magnitude of the trouble, and flourish in the general ruin like the storm bird which careers in the tempest which is devastating the face of nature. Those parties are ever ready to impeach such as have the courage to expose corruption, and to labor in a spirit of true patriotism for the welfare of their country.

My colleague would like to make the country believe that he is especially devoted to the preservation of the Union, and to the prosecution of the war for that end. How sincere he is in his professions appears from his course on the following resolutions, which I had the honor to introduce on the 18th day of January last:

"Whereas a great civil war like that which now afflicts the United States is the most grievous of all national calamities, producing, as it does, spoliation,

bloodshed, anarchy, public debt, official corruption, and private immorality; and whereas the American Government cannot rightfully wage such a war upon any portion of its people except for the sole purpose of vindicating the Constitution and laws and restoring both to their just supremacy; and whereas this House on the 22d day of July, 1861, speaking in the name of the American people, in the face of the world, solemnly and truly declared that it was waged for no purpose of conquest or oppression, but solely to restore the Union with all the rights of the people and of the States unimpaired; and whereas in every war, especially in every war of invasion, and most particularly if it be a civil war between portions of the same country, the object of it ought to be clearly defined, and the terms distinctly stated upon which hostilities will cease, and the advancing armies of the Government should carry the Constitution and laws in one hand while they hold the sword in the other, so that the invaded party may have its choice between the two: Therefore,

Resolved, That the President be required to make known, by public proclamation or otherwise, to all the country that whenever any State now in insurrection shall submit herself to the authority of the Federal Government as defined in the Constitution, all hostilities against her shall cease, and such State shall be protected from all external interference with her local laws and institutions, and her people shall be guaranteed in the full enjoyment of all those rights which the Federal Constitution gave them.

"Mr. STEVENS moved to lay the preamble and resolution on the table.

"Mr. DAWSON demanded the yeas and nays.

"The yeas and nays were ordered.

"The question was taken; and it was decided in the affirmative—yeas 79, nays 56; as follows:

"YEAS—Messrs. Allison, Ames, Arnold, Ashley, John D. Baldwin, Daxter, Beaman, Blaine, Francis P. Blair, Jacob B. Blair, Boutwell, Brandegee, Broomall, Ambrose W. Clark, Freeman Clark, Cole, Creswell, Henry Winter Davis, Thomas T. Davis, Dawes, Deming, Dixon, Driggs, Eckley, Elliot, Farnsworth, Fenton, Frank, Garfield, Gooch, Higby, Hooper, Hotchkiss, Asabel W. Hubbard, Hulburd, Jenekes, Julian, Kasson, Kelley, Francis W. Kellogg, Longyear, Lovejoy, Marvin, McBride, McClurg, McIndoe, Samuel F. Miller, MOORHEAD, Morrill, Daniel Morris, Amos Myers, Leonard Myers, Charles O'Neill, Orth, Patterson, Pike, Price, William H. Randall, Alexander H. Rice, John H. Rice, Edward H. Rollins, Schenck, Seofield, Shannon, Smith, Smithers, Spalding, Stevens, Thayer, Thomas, Upson, Van Valkenburg, Elihu B. Washburne, William B. Washburn, Whaley, Williams, Wilson, Windom, and Woodbridge—79.

"NAYS—Messrs. James C. Allen, Ancona, Augustus C. Baldwin, Bliss, Brooks, James S. Brown, William G. Brown, Chanler, Coffroth, Cox, Dawson, Denison, Eden, Edgerton, Eldridge, English, Finck, Ganson, Grider, Griswold, Hale, Hall, Harding, Harrington, Benjamin G. Harris, Herriek, Holman, Hutchins, William Johnson, Kernan, Lazear, Le Blond, Long, Marcy, McAllister, McDowell, McKinney, Middleton, William H. Miller, James R. Morris, Morrison, Nelson, Pendleton, Robinson, Ross, John B. Steele, Stiles, Stuart, Sweat, Voorhees, Wadsworth, Wheeler, Chilton A. White, Joseph W. White, Fernando Wood, and Yeaman—56.

"So the preamble and resolution were laid upon the table."

It is thus seen that under the lead of the chairman of Ways and Means, my colleague [Mr. MOORHEAD] voted to lay these resolutions upon the table. By that vote he has declared that the war should not terminate though the people of the South should lay down their arms and submit to the authority of the Government. Although the war has lasted for nearly three years, and has spread death and desolation in its path, though it has broken up our industry, burdened us with mighty debts, shingled us with taxation, and demoralized our people; though it threatens the overthrow of our Republican system and the substitution of a despotism in its place, yet he refuses by his vote to adopt the only basis upon which peace and order and stability can be again secured. His policy means abolition, subjugation, and extermination. Fresh hecatombs must be offered to appease his insatiable appetite for blood.

It is my solemn conviction that it is only upon the basis of those resolutions that this struggle can be brought to a peaceful and successful termination. To this conclusion we must come at last. Fanaticism and evil men may delay this result, and the country may have to be exhausted by the fires of civil war ere it becomes a reality.

When the world, as related by the sacred historian, was buried under the deluge, and Noah and his family were the sole survivors of the human race, it will be recollected that the dove was sent forth from the ark for some token of the reappearance of the land. After traversing for many days the waste of waters she found no rest for the sole of her foot, and returned again to Noah. A second time she was sent forth, and this time she brought back the olive-branch, the harbinger of certain subsidence of the waters. A third time she was sent for encouraging indications, and this time she returned no more, for the waters had retired to their recesses in the great deep, and the world was redeemed from the curse. Let the friends of constitutional government derive encouragement from the lesson. The substance of the resolutions may yet, like the dove, find amid the deluge of domestic troubles a secure resting place, and restore a nation from the grasp of dissolution.

My colleague, in the conclusion of his speech, says, "With the rebellion thus suppressed" this great country shall become the "asylum of the down-trodden and oppressed of every nation." Here we join hands in cordial agreement. I only regret the memory as well as the record of the fact that my colleague, although the son of an Irishman, joined the Know-Nothing Lodge, and engaged in the crusade to deprive Irishmen of the rights of citizenship, and Catholics of their religious liberties. The Germans, too, he aimed to make the victims of his vengeance. But the countrymen of Emmett and Curren and Grattan still live, and are marching in thousands by the side of the hardy German, carrying the flag of the Union through blood and fire to defend for *him* that home from which he would have excluded *them*.

My colleague for the greater part of his life has been a Democrat, at least in profession. In those days abolitionism was powerless and he was opposed to it. It comes with an ill grace from him now, indeed. It is a slander to say that the Democratic party has sympathy with the rebellion. It is a slander repeated by the lowest as well as those favored with position.

It has been conceded by members of the Democratic party that there was provocation for the rebellion, but no justification. In my remarks of the 24th of February I characterized secession as treason. I endeavored to show that as a legitimate result of the State rights doctrine, secession and nullification have no warrant in the Constitution. Yet my colleague, with great facility of conclusion, pronounces this the doctrine of John C. Calhoun. He has sadly changed since the days when he was a Democrat and claims to have been the friend of General Cass; the days when he prospered on the patronage of that great organization whose policy and patriotism upheld this Government for three quarters of a century, and which is still willing to shield it and save it or perish in the effort. Then he believed that if ever abolitionism got the Government in its hands the country would rush headlong to ruin. Now he gloats over the fulfillment of the prophecy. Now he votes to give this Hall for a British enemy of the Union to lecture in, and assists to degrade the nation by approving a eulogy on John Brown, the

traitor and the murderer. When he bows down in homage to George Thompson, the man who for thirty years has been plotting the destruction of this Republic, he should be careful how he applies the word disloyal, and make no reference to General Cass, the patriot who gave his days and nights during all that time to the safety of the nation.

Mr. Speaker, the motives of the Democratic party require no defense. It has ever been the party of freedom and of progress, ever the defender of the Constitution, the laws, and the Union of the States. At the present moment that great old party, covered all over with truth, like the armor of Achilles, may well say, "Thrice is he armed who hath his quar-

rel just." That great party clings to the Constitution, nor does not change its principles nor its independence for the favor of a President who is but temporarily in power. The one it regards merely as a man, the sun of whose official life is fast going down, and soon there will be an end of his power and importance. The other, the Constitution, is the Magna Charta of their liberties, in which is stored the hopes of the present and of millions to come after us, and in the preservation of which is centered the interests of the people of every clime.

I will now yield a part of my time to my colleague [Mr. MOORHEAD] to reply to what I have said, if he desires to do so

